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from the editor

E. Gary Hill

MARTY McFLY HERE. Please step into my stainless steel DeLorean as I crank it up and take us 5 years up the road to 2019. You recognize that date, of course, as it has been much on the American track fan's mind of late, what with Eugene's bid for that year's World Championships. And as you undoubtedly know already, Eugene lost that bid to Doha (see p. 40).

No, this column isn't about the rightness or wrongness of the decision. That's a done deal, so let's discuss the ramifications thereof, even though there are two other Worlds (Beijing '15 & London '17) to get out of the way first. Obviously, the heat is going to be ugly. That's a given, but the Qataris are working on it, and they're right when they say that other Worlds have been in conditions just about as bad.

**It's already time for
USATF to be thinking
about its 2019 Nationals**

What is unique about the Doha bid, though, is the timing. The meet won't start until September 28. The latest any previous WC has cranked up? August 28, at Rome's edition in '87. That lateness will wreak utter havoc with the Diamond League schedule (a timetable with which, you will surely recall from recent installments of this column, I already have great issues), but hopefully the IAAF will have some brilliant ideas on how to craft a meaningful schedule out of the corner they've painted themselves into.

As premature as it may sound, before they start painting, it's already time for USATF to be thinking about the timing of its Nationals (the WC qualifier) that year.

I have long ranted about the traditional late-June timing being horribly out of touch with the realities of modern international competition, with a too-large break between the USATF Championships and the Worlds compromising Team USA's ability to field the best team possible. Obviously, if you have joined me in believing that the typical late-June/mid-August gap was bad, imagine how bad it will be when the Worlds moves to late-September.

So the '19 USATF needs to move. And by a lot. If you're going to move it, make it a real move. My suggestion is that it needs to be the first weekend of September, leaving two off-weeks before things crank up in Qatar. That might compromise IAAF thinking on its DL series a bit, but I think USATF needs to exercise its tail-wagging-the-dog power here by making a preemptive strike and announcing well in advance that it has that weekend staked out.

Furthermore, this is a good time to realize that not all events are created equal, and there are some disciplines which would benefit from being contested a bit farther out. The 10,000 squad, for example, should be chosen much earlier than 3 weeks away.

Or take the decathlon. I asked the world's two best decathletes what they thought and Trey Hardee said, "Everyone is different; for me, 5 weeks." Ashton Eaton's response was "6 weeks for me."

Note, by the way, that next year's USATF/Beijing gap will be 8 weeks, so we're not maximizing what either of them finds optimal now, let alone then.

Has anyone at USATF ever actually surveyed the nation's elite coaches/athletes to find out what they think the right positioning is for international selection meets? Or do we just do it in late June because that's most convenient relative to the end of the collegiate season and we've done it that way for decades without actually thinking about it?

Since back in the days when U.S. teams were always 3-deep in every event and could be counted on to rack up medals across the board, the landscape has changed mightily. At a time when just getting qualifiers in many events is becoming problematic, does Indy really want to be compounding the problem by staging the qualifying meet in knee-jerk fashion?

2019 is a glaring example of a meet that needs to be changed, but surely there are lessons to be learned starting much earlier than that. If there's any good to come out of the affair in the desert, perhaps it will be to foment change in Nationals timing, even if it means a smaller meet.